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ON THE ART OF WAR  
A CONTRAST OF CLAUSEWITZ AND SUN TZU (U)

An Individual Study Project  
Intended for Publication

by

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28 March 1989

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# ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: James A. Orahood, LTC, AV

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A Contrast of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu

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Military officers must be skilled in strategy and the operational art of campaigning. To acquire these skills, part of their learning must include study of the warfighting experiences of others as well as understanding the concepts of the classic military theorists. Young officers probably don't read enough of the theorists to gain the depth of understanding that is needed, yet that is where the conceptual ability to strategize is gained. In this study, a comparison is made of the two greatest classic military strategists, Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. Using the WW I battle of Verdun and the 1950's battle of Dienbienphu as a framework, this study uses tangible historical examples to highlight and compare their teachings on war and strategy in such a way that the young military officer can gain a basic understanding of these concepts.

ON THE ART OF WAR  
A CONTRAST OF CLAUSEWITZ AND SUN TZU

The focus of U.S. military strategy today is the deterrence of war. To deter we must be ready and show our willingness to fight and win in war. If we are to fight and win, military officers must be skilled in strategy and the operational art of conducting campaigns. It is, and always has been, the military officer's responsibility to acquire such skills in peacetime. This becomes even more important as we think about a future war that may not be of sufficient duration to allow much on-the-job learning. In the business of the professional soldier it is enriching to think about, study and make judgments on warfighting experiences of others and to understand the writings of the great military theorists. These writings and the histories of past campaigns provide the laboratory of the professional military officer, but the theorists are many and can be difficult to read. As a result, young officers probably don't read enough of the theorists to be able to use their theories to understand war. The challenge then is to study and use the ideas of the great theorists but as a guide and not as a prescription in order to improve the effectiveness of our armed forces and our abilities to lead them.

In this study a comparison and contrast will be made of the two greatest classic military strategists of all time: Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz. Sun Tzu wrote a book entitled The Art of

War, more than 2500 years ago. Clausewitz wrote a treatise entitled On War, that was first published in 1832.

Clausewitz is best remembered for his famous dictum that "War is nothing but the continuation of policy by other means," (1869) and it must be kept in its political context. Michael Handel, a professor at the U.S. Army War College summarized Clausewitz's teachings in this way:

War must be governed exclusively by political considerations. In theory it aspires to extremes, but in reality it is moderated by uncertainty, friction, and lack of intelligence. War cannot be reduced to a science; therefore, manuals or rigid doctrines on how to fight wars are useless. This is why there is no substitute for the experience and intuition of the military genius. While war can often be won by a decisive success on the battlefield, obtainable only at a heavy cost in blood. The key to victory on the battlefield is to be very strong at the decisive moment and place. Every attack eventually exhausts itself; therefore, it is important to stop attacking and to move over to the defensive while still having the upper hand. In such a way the political and military leaders can make the most of the inherent advantages of the defense over the attack, and war can best be used to achieve the goals set by the political authorities as dictated by the national interest. (15)

While Clausewitz's observations are at times ambiguous and

some have become outdated (by new weapons such as air power), he perhaps more than any other military writer, understands and expressed the unchanging elements of war.

Sun Tzu's essays on The Art of War, written in 500 B.C., are the earliest known treatises on the subject of war. He is probably best known for saying that in war, "supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting." (9:26)

In the most recent translation of Sun Tzu's writings, Marshal Liu Bochong, a former president of the Chinese Military Academy, summarized Sun Tzu's work as follows:

1. The book is an ancient work on universal laws of war. It profoundly expounds factors leading to victory and to defeat, and stresses the importance of calculations (the final military decision before a war).
2. The book stresses the relationship between war and factors of politics, economics, diplomacy, astronomy, and geography. A commander is required to judge the hour and size up the situation and anticipate the enemy's decisions before launching or directing a war. He should never act rashly.
3. The book emphasizes defeating one's enemy by strategic considerations, not by force.
4. It places stress on the importance of employing troops flexibly, according to the position and conditions of your enemy and yourself, and of topography.



5. It attaches great importance to "knowing your enemy and yourself" if you want to win a war. In present-day language, it means one must be realistic and practical and be certain about all situations before making the final decisions to fight. Subjective assumption and rash action surely lead to defeat.

6. It advocates that employing troops must be unpredictable to the enemy and catch him by surprise. It stresses that when you attack, attack with overwhelming superiority like a fierce tiger, and when you want to end a battle, end it as suddenly as a flash of lightning. (4:8)

As the first great mind to codify strategic thought, his 13 small essays rank among the best of all time. His feel for strategic interrelationships and constraints is as valid today as it was in his day and most of his writings make just as much sense today as they did then.

To lay out a framework in which to compare these two masters of military strategy and their teachings on war it is best to use tangible examples. The first such example is the battle of Verdun. The account of the battle at Verdun and the decisions that led up to it are based on Horne's book, Death of a Generation, Liddell Hart's, The War in Outline, 1914-18, and Kabisch's, Controversial Questions of the World War.

By 1915, World War I had reached a deadlock in the West. The very implacability of the western front had virtually destroyed strategy. Terrible slaughter and the size of battles

themselves seemed to demand a final decision on the western front. Entrenchments, barbed wire, machine guns and heavy artillery formed a barrier as impenetrable as a fortress wall and maneuver was impossible. The German commander, Falkenhayn, recognized this strength in the defense and based his strategy on it. The Germans would defend in the West for a time and increase the number of forces on the Eastern Front. The Allies, confronted with the German defensive system, considered two obvious methods of dealing with it: either break through or go around it. The French, who had the preponderance of troops on the Western Front, favored the break through. The desire to recover their lost territory narrowed their thoughts and dominated their strategy. The strongest part of the enemy force lay to their front; crush it and the way is clear. They didn't ponder long enough how to crush it. The British opinion was divided, but most agreed with the French. The minority opinion among the British favored a strategic envelopment of the German position through the use of British sea power in attacks against Germany's allies. This strategic envelopment took the form of the Dardanelles campaign and other initiatives, however, neither the Allies nor the Germans experienced any real successes during 1915. Based on this lack of success, General Joffre, commander of French forces concluded that the war would have to be won through attrition. An Allied conference in late 1915 planned a coordinated offensive against all three German fronts for 1916. The effort in the Western Front would be an attack in the Somme

River area.

Falkenhayn anticipated this allied plan but concluded that a successful German operation in the Somme area would require more troops than he had, so he decided to attack on a narrow front in the Verdun area. His thinking was that German propaganda had taken its toll in France and war-weariness was beginning to show. The fall of a historic fortress city like Verdun could shake French morale and possibly win an early peace. The French, knowing this, would thrust every available soldier into the battle, allowing the Germans, whether or not they took their objective, to bleed the French Army dry.

On 21 February, the Germans opened with a standard 12 hour bombardment which wrecked the French defenses. The sheer weight of metal was unlike any ever experienced. Trenches were obliterated and troops buried in them. The air was a storm of stones and timbers being splintered and rained upon troops. Flame throwers and phosgene gas caused ghastly wounds and deaths. The cold caused wounds to be frozen and the untended wounded were so numerous that only a fraction could be evacuated. Initially, the French were so full of their own offensive schemes that they failed to heed the fact that this was not just another feint, but a full scale attack. By 24 February, the French entrenchments north of Verdun had been breached at a tremendous loss of life. The French army had been forced into an unexpected and desperate defense and French reinforcements were being fed into the gaps that were opened in the withdrawing

forces. French commanders prepared to withdraw to a more defensible position on the west bank of the Meuse, when Joffre threatened court-martial for any general who retreated. Under General Petain, new commander of the defenses around Verdun, a new defense line was established around some old forts on the heights east of the Meuse. The Germans continued to attack but the French resistance stiffened as they kept reinforcing their line with replacements, and on the 29th the attack halted from exhaustion.

The French continued to pour in reinforcements and set a logistical precedent by operating an endless chain of trucks along a highway from Bar-le-Duc into Verdun. On 6 March the attack renewed. German progress was slow, and casualties on both sides soared. By 9 April, the offensive had almost ground to a standstill. Falkenhayn wanted to halt, but was ordered to continue and expand the offensive by the Crown Prince. Falkenhayn agreed to continue the offensive but refused to enlarge it. In the next three months, the Germans managed to move the line in some places as much as a mile. Near the end of June, Petain asked to withdraw but Joffre refused, knowing that the British were about to attack on the Somme River. The French hung on despite a withering attack on 11 June that almost breached their line.

Falkenhayn was relieved by the Hindenburg-Ludendorff team, who ceased the Verdun offensive, since the Somme now had priority. The French counterattacked in October through December

and regained some 30 square miles of territory. Losses at Verdun were almost 1 million men in this eleven month action, that gained the Germans a territory about 5 miles deep and 20 miles long.

As a military officer, you must examine these events and ask yourself what kind of flawed strategic thinking went into decisions that caused loss of life that exceeded 2.3 million men in one year alone; two major battles that decimated a large segment of the young men of three nations. Why not go around it? The British were a major seapower and the Russians were making the Germans fight a two-front war.

Clausewitz said that, "every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar pre - conceptions...the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities. One cannot, therefore, understand and appreciate the commanders of the past until one has placed oneself in the situation of their times." (1:593) Following this thought let's examine the strategy by putting ourselves first in the situation of the Germans. The battles in the West are deadlocked and there are no more troops to spare because we are also maintaining an Eastern front. Clausewitz counsels that "the defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive." Defense has the advantages of surprise (the ability to face an attacker at one point with more troops than he expected), terrain (concealment, obstacles and the like), and concentric attack (crossfires and such). "When one has used

defensive measures successfully, a more favorable balance of strength is usually created; thus, the natural course in war is to begin defensively and end by attacking."(1:358)

Clausewitz makes the point that it is easier to hold a piece of terrain than to take it, but that the defense is not purely passive. He makes a further point that the defender is really awaiting the right moment to strike a killing blow on the attacker. The defender is actually taking a defensive position so that he may fight from it, not to just sit idly by and let the attacker overcome him. He describes the point at which the defender goes on the attack as the "culminating point". The "culminating point" is the point at which the "attacker's superiority is exhausted" and it is possible to react "with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack."(1:528)

Sun Tzu said, "Defend yourself when you cannot defeat the enemy, and attack the enemy when you can. One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant...the skillful commander takes up a position in which he cannot be defeated and misses no opportunity to overcome his enemy."

(4:101) As Falkenhayn had concluded, he could not support offensive operations on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, so it was prudent to accept a defensive posture on the Western Front. Both great strategists agree with the decision to defend. As both Sun Tzu and Clausewitz conclude, the defense has also the advantage of giving the defender time to strengthen his situation

and the Germans used the entire year, 1915, to expand their rail net so that rapid movement of reinforcements and supplies could occur, mobilize their industry and train their troops in this new form of warfare called trench warfare. As a comment on the two great theorists, notice how each explained their concept. Clausewitz states his idea and then goes on to elaborate, leaving the reader with a lot to read, but less to ponder. Sun Tzu, on the other hand, says what he means in a few short thoughts but leaves you with some necessity to ponder. Theory is much clearer when you have them both to compare and have both of their thoughts to consider.

The Allies, and specifically France, were in the unenviable position of conducting warfare on their own soil. In Western Europe, defenders do not have the luxury of withdrawing very far before they are giving up terrain and resources that are vital to their war-making capacity, unlike a country such as Russia, who can trade space for the right time to counterattack. Even so, the French, in 1914, were more able to let the German armies play themselves out by their "own exertions"(1:384) and then show "the flashing sword of vengeance"(1:370) at the Marne. This stopped the German offensive and put them in a defensive posture, which is the way the situation stayed throughout 1915. Even though the Allies were able to rupture the German flanks occasionally on the sea and on the Swiss border, they could never maneuver enough forces to exploit and so it remained a virtual stalemate.

Both Clausewitz and Sun Tzu address the stalemate or protracted war that this conflict became. In the initial stages of war the "retreat" that the French had to conduct "directly strengthen(ed) the fighting forces" by cutting their losses, but it had a psychological drawback. It is rare when "the army and the nation fully understand the reasons for withdrawing" and there is always "public concern and resentment at the fate of the abandoned areas; the army will possibly lose confidence not only in its leaders but in itself." (1:471) Such was the situation in France in 1915, and it was magnified by German propaganda to the point that public morale and will became major issues.

Sun Tzu spoke of morale and long wars and said that, "When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, the men's weapons will grow dull and their ardor will be dampened... Again, if the campaign is protracted the resources of the State will not be equal to the strain... Thus, though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been associated with long delays. There is no instance of a country having been benefitted from prolonged warfare." (9:24) The French had not expected the Germans to penetrate their defenses, let alone occupy the country for such a long time, so this siege sapped their resources as well as their morale. The Germans, on the other hand, had expected a quick capitulation and not a prolonged state of war and so, too, were being drained of resources. As earlier stated, both sides went into 1916 resolved to finish the war as quickly as possible.



The battle of Verdun seems like a tragic waste in retrospect, but from the French perspective at the time, it had to be defended, virtually at all costs. Strategically, the loss of Verdun would not have been so bad; it was already dismantled and the French line would have been shorter and stronger without it. The problem was that, for the French, it was a historically sacred position and the French nation would hardly have stood the shock of such a withdrawal; so it was, for the French a defensive "center of gravity". Verdun was a "hub of all power" (1595-96) in a morale sense for the French and its loss could have weakened the will of the French people to continue to fight. Falkenhayn thought that by attacking this point of French pride that the French would commit reserves to the last man to hold Verdun, thus allowing the Germans to bleed France to death, as French soldiers were fed into the maw of German guns. The expected result would be to raise morale in the German homeland and demoralize the French. The actual results were opposite of German desires. The battle at Verdun produced a patriotism and resolve in the French while in the German homeland public opinion and prestige suffered. The Germans had also sought to damage France as much as possible, thereby decreasing her ability to conduct offensive operations. Again, the Germans failed as they underestimated allied resources and resolve.

Germany was pursuing the Clausewitzian dictum of attacking the enemy's "center of gravity". In Alistair Horne's account of World War I, "Death of a Generation", he emphasizes that Germany

saw England as the real enemy and France was a weapon in England's arsenal. Direct overthrow of England was impossible and even defeat of her land force or expulsion from France would not force peace so Germany had to show England the hopelessness of continuing the war. The German logic was that it couldn't be won by attrition, but if France could be made to see that there was nothing more to gain militarily then France would cease and England would lose its best weapon. As Clausewitz says, there "is no higher and simpler law of strategy"(1:204) than to concentrate on the enemy's weakest link.

On War, is a masterpiece, but it is risky to consider it as a complete work. By Clausewitz's own reckoning, On War, is not only unfinished but even parts that are finished require some more development and interpretation. Problems can emerge when concepts or relationships are considered valid based solely on the fact that they originated with him. The "center of gravity" concept is one such problem. To briefly give an example, Clausewitz noted at one point that "center of gravity is always found where the mass is concentrated most densely."(1:485) This is true at a theater level because "a theater of war, be it large or small, and the forces stationed there, no matter what their size, represent the sort of unity in which a single center of gravity can be identified."(1:487) So at this level of operation the center of gravity is in the armed forces.

Then in book eight of On War, Clausewitz changes from the operational level of war and describes other possible centers of

gravity at a level that we classify as strategic today. He says that, "In countries subject to domestic strife, the center of gravity is generally the capital. In small countries that rely on large ones, it is usually the army of their protector. Among alliances, it lies in the community of interest, and in popular uprisings it is the personalities of the leaders and public opinion." (1:596) This seems to indicate that Clausewitz was not absolutely positive about whether a center of gravity is linked solely to the military forces or was linked to the wider concept of the enemy's ability to conduct war.

The center of gravity concept is a key principle in the Clausewitzian theory and he argues that the "first task...in planning for a war is to identify the enemy's centers of gravity, and if possible trace them back to a single one." (1:619) How a strategic planner approaches the choice of centers of gravity will have a profound impact. To make it even more difficult for western strategists, versed in the west European and U.S. doctrine that deals with industrial might, high technology war machines, superhighways and railroad networks, we are increasingly involved in making war plans that can deal with an enemy from an underdeveloped nation and a radically different ideology. As we form our strategic thinking, military men must be cognizant of these differences and learn to think like the enemy. Even in the short period since WW II, we have had examples of just such thinking and planning that went from concept, to decision to quagmire as a result of flawed strategy in a part of

the world that is dramatically different from the West.

One of the truly decisive battles of the 20th century happened in 1954. In a 56 day siege, 13,000 soldiers of the French forces at Dienbienphu, with modern arms and equipment were defeated by a force of 49,500 Vietminh soldiers that the French considered to be little better than rabble. This was not even a long siege when compared to Stalingrad (76 days), or Bataan (66 days), or other well known sieges. What had initially been considered a colonial war ceased to be one in 1949 , when Communist China arrived on Vietnam's borders. The account of the battle at Dienbienphu that follows, and the actions that led to it are primarily from Jules Roy's book, The Battle of Dienbienphu, and Marvin Gettleman's book, Vietnam.

In 1953, Laotian and French forces held the Mekong valley and the airfields of the Plain of Jars. The rest of Vietnam was a continuous belt of Communist-held territory from the Chinese border to just north of Saigon. This situation left the French only one choice to create a situation in which to negotiate a cease-fire under favorable terms. They needed to create a military situation that would allow them to achieve a victory over the core of the regular Communist divisions, thus accomplishing a second goal of eliminating the invasion threat to Laos and the Red River delta and its capital cities of Hanoi and Haiphong.

In Marvin Gettleman's book, Vietnam, (12:109) he explains that the French felt that the way to do this was by creating a

target for the Communists that was sufficiently inviting for their regular divisions to jump on but sufficiently strong to resist the attack once it came. This was the rationale for Dienbienphu and what occurred there in 1954.

The French apparently failed to realize that in a country that lacks European-style roads, there are no blocking positions. The Vietminh relied on human porters for resupply and they could easily walk around a blocking position such as Dienbienphu, while easily bottling up the forces contained in such strongholds. That is precisely what General Giap's Vietminh divisions did after the French, under General Navarre, had occupied Dienbienphu, in November 1953. By Christmas 1953, Indochina was cut in two for the first time in the eight years of war. By March 1954, when the battle went into high gear, the French had over 1000 casualties from unsuccessful sorties and small skirmishes that had provided little tangible result.

In March 1954, the battle started for good and over 200 Vietminh artillery pieces and Russian rockets smashed the French position to rubble in the early days of the siege as a brutal artillery duel ensued. The French had to keep their artillery in the open in order to use the full 360 degree field of fire and so, in one day, were destroyed one by one in a duel that the Vietminh would have won sooner or later. The one-armed French artillery commander, Colonel Piroth, had "guaranteed" that his 24 105mm howitzers, and 4 155mm howitzers would destroy any enemy artillery not destroyed by the fighter-bombers. As it

turned out, the Vietminh artillery was so well camouflaged that it is doubtful whether they silenced more than just a few of the enemy's pieces. That night Colonel Piroth killed himself with a hand grenade, since with only one arm he could not cock a pistol. He felt that his cockiness had contributed to the French air of overconfidence and he knew after the day's defeat that they were doomed.

Nearly everything else the French had planned proved to be an illusion too, as General Giap used a mixture of siege techniques, artillery attacks and human-wave assaults. French losses were so great that reinforcements that parachuted in were insufficient to counterattack. The terrain and distances involved made a breakthrough by a relief column from Laos or Hanoi hopeless and Dienbienphu slowly starved for lack of sufficient airlift tonnage. The garrison shrank to the size of a ball park as the battle of attrition wore on. Pilots who flew the run into Dienbienphu said that the flak in the valley was as thick as that encountered in the Ruhr Valley in WW II. There were nearly 83,000 parachutes expended in resupply efforts and observers say they covered the battlefield like a burial shroud.

After 54 days, on 7 May 1954, the French garrison surrendered. France had lost only 5% of its battle force while costing the enemy 25,000 casualties, but the loss in confidence by the French population back home was the real outcome of this contest.

Tactically, or operationally, there is a lesson to learn

from this experience, best explained by Clausewitz as he expands on the relationship between the attacker and the defender. The attacker has the one advantage of being free to strike at any point along the defensive line. "For the attacker it is easier to surround the whole opposing force and cut it off than it is for the defender..."(1:360) since the defender is tied to a position. Such was the case for the French at Dienbienphu.

But Clausewitz also counsels that defense is the stronger form of warfare than the offense because it is "easier to hold ground than take it. It follows that defense is easier than attack, assuming both sides have equal means."(1:357) The French miscalculation of the Vietminh forces made them the seriously outnumbered force in this battle in terms of artillery, number of soldiers and especially in resupply. French defense at Verdun (WW I) was bolstered by a world class system of resupply. At Dienbienphu, the only means of resupply was airlift and it was not adequate to the task, so both sides did not have "equal means". Clausewitz would likely have advised the French strategists not to gamble on Dienbienphu to resolve the Indochina war.

In fact, Clausewitz says that there "is no higher and simpler law of strategy,"(1:204) than to concentrate your force on the enemy's weak point, his "center of gravity". He explains that "one must keep the dominant characteristic of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement,

on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed." (1:595-96) And so, the strategist's task is to determine the enemy's center of gravity which may be his armed forces, his allies, or his capital. The French decided, right or wrong, that the "center of gravity" for the communists was the Vietminh armed force; a daring, maybe poorly thought-out gamble.

Clausewitz reminds strategists not to overlook the immense effect of the physical effort on soldiers engaged in combat operations, when he explains the "friction" of war. "If no one had the right to give his views on military operations except when he is frozen, or faint from heat and thirst, or depressed from privation and fatigue, objective and accurate views would be even rarer than they are." (1:115) After 8 years of constant conflict with the Vietminh forces, elusive guerillas who were little more than rabble, but who were taking a decisive toll on a modern western army, the French were driven to do something that would end this conflict quickly and decisively. However, the French leadership decided on and orchestrated the battle of Dienbienphu from offices in Hanoi. The new French commander had just recently been posted to Indochina. Possibly the leaders would have decided otherwise if they had shared the privations of the soldiers a little bit more.

To use Sun Tzu's counsel on long wars again, he said that "When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, the men's weapons will grow dull and their ardor will



be dampened...if the campaign is protracted the resources of the state will not be equal to the strain." After 8 long years , the French economy was strained and the people back home were politically and morally shocked into throwing in the towel after Dienbienphu, even though this battle involved only a small portion of the French forces in Indochina. "There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefitted." (9:24)

Sun Tzu would have advised the French against a reckless war in the field with the enemy. In fact, in Sun Tzu's, Art of War, there are some principles that he felt important such as: "to disrupt the enemy's alliances,"..."to attack the enemy's strategy,"...and "to subdue the enemy without fighting." (4:99) He counselled that in warfighting, one must attack the enemy's strategy first and disrupt his diplomatic efforts to defeat his forces without fighting.

Sun Tzu teaches that "all warfare is based on deception", which is to say, you should always attempt to confuse your enemy. Always use your forces at an unexpected time and place to catch the enemy by surprise. Certainly, the French could have fared better using deception at Dienbienphu, rather than the audacious gamble that they used. "When able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near...if he is

superior in strength, evade him...pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant." (9:29) It seems that General Giap may have read Sun Tzu's book, because the Vietminh used these very elements to deceive the French at Dienbienphu.

There are no easy explanations for military defeats such as Dienbienphu, for it is necessary to uncover long successions of misunderstandings and problems which led to the mistakes that resulted in the defeat. For professional military men to avoid the same mistakes it is necessary for us to study not only the battle itself but the situation of that period in history that led to the battle, for out of that often comes the major lesson to be learned. As we study Dienbienphu, there are tales of gallantry on both sides that lead one to believe that the men that fought the battle gave their utmost. So, whose fault was it?

Sun Tzu says that, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." (9:28) It was General Navarre who decided in December 1953, to everyone's astonishment, that the French would bait the Vietminh into fighting at Dienbienphu. From all accounts, Navarre, schooled in the European-type battlefield had failed to realize that there are no blocking positions in a country that doesn't have European-style roads and where supplies and forces move on foot. This also led to a fatal underestimate of the enemy's ability to mass artillery.

The French had planned to get resupply by air but had not anticipated Vietminh anti-aircraft capability nor the massive resupply requirements and so were not able to sustain. And lastly, the Vietminh were not considered to be capably led nor to be professional fighters, and this combined to cause the catastrophe that ensued.

In his notable book on Dienbienphu, Jules Roy concludes that the debacle occurred not due to a shortage of men, guns or bullets, but due to intangibles. He cites one of these as being an arrogance of the French military and political leaders and their contempt for Asians. General Navarre believed, based on his western military experience, that he could inflict a stunning defeat on the Vietminh there. He obviously underestimated the Communist enemy (11:KV) and "succumbed in battle" as Sun Tzu predicted.

There has long been a need to have a clear, concise work on theory that can be read and understood by the military man who is new to the business. It ought to be a theory that espouses a balanced approach to war. That is, one that seeks a political solution to a situation before a military solution, one that seeks a military advantage before a military conflict. That need has been increased with the evolution and development of nuclear weapons and the re-emergence of China and Japan as potential world powers.

As we look into the future, economics will play an ever increasing role in strategy formulation, politics and war

planning. One of the noted and more common criticisms of Clausewitz is the absence from his work of any consideration of economic war. In contrast, Sun Tzu attached great importance to the interrelationship of economics and military action. He wrote: "In the operations of war, where there are in the field a thousand swift chariots, as many heavy chariots and a hundred thousand mail-clad soldiers, with provisions enough to carry them a thousand li [ 2.78 modern li =1 mile ] the expenditure at home and at the front, including entertainment of guests, small items such as glue and paint, and sums spent on chariots and armor, will reach the total of a thousand ounces of silver per day. Such is the cost of raising an army of 100,000 men." (3:44) Change chariots to tanks, guests to newsmen and congressmen, glue and paint to repair parts and munitions, and think of transporting this corps to Europe, and you have moved forward in history 2500 years without changing the economic situation at all.

Sun Tzu added: "When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming...the resources of the state will not be equal to the strain." (3:44-45) So, just as the French experienced in Southeast Asia, Sun Tzu also set great stock in the financial situation of his country. Sun Tzu goes on in his writings to discuss the outcomes if the war is not won quickly, which is the equivalent of modern day tax increases and ultimately a depletion of the nation's treasury which leads to a desperate situation in which, "other chieftains will spring up

to take advantage of your extremity." (3:45)

Compared with wars in Sun Tzu's time, modern day wars are far more dependent on economics. Also, the more technologically developed an army is, the more dependent it is on economics. Sun Tzu's concept of the interrelationships of war and economics has not lost its meaning with the passage time.

This essay illustrates the immense wisdom that can be gained from each of these classic strategists. Interestingly, both great theorists agree, and in fact provide the same counsel on many major points. As Clausewitz wrote, and Sun Tzu would have agreed (albeit in more concise terms), there is in war a "paradoxical trinity - composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government." (1:39) He goes on to explain that, "These three tendencies are like different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable in their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless." (1:89)

Sun Tzu emphasizes politics, diplomacy and strategic

considerations (4:13) as his trinity, that must be employed to subdue the enemy. He was of the opinion that it was far better to win or make an enemy yield through superior diplomatic capability and powerful military and economic strength rather than through warring. That corresponds to today's strategy of nuclear deterrence and "bargaining from a position of strength" in the current arms limitations talks.

Such were the conclusions of the world's two greatest classic military strategists. It is an excellent place for a young military officer to begin.

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